CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

(A Resume of the Discussions)

I

Plato is one of the foremost thinkers in ancient Greece who has devoted his whole life in the quest after deep philosophical knowledge. The philosophical issues which he raised are of lasting value and significance. The manner and method by which he approaches the problems and suggests solution are, indeed, marked by profusion of thought and novelty in explanation. He is one of the greatest philosophers of the world whose influence upon generations after generations of thinkers is pertinent. A.N. Whitehead, an eminent 20th century philosopher has rightly declared that "The safest general characterisation of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of foot-notes to Plato."

Plato is also the earliest philosopher who has developed a philosophical theory of knowledge, of reality, of conduct and of the state. He has developed a metaphysical system based on reason. He is one of the earliest philosophers who has distinguished between appearance and reality. In his Theory of Ideas or
forms, he maints that the world as it appears to us is the world of shadow and unreality and that behind and beyond the outward illusion, there is the real world which is peopled by the unchanging, universal and eternal ideas or forms which are the only realities.

... Plato’s written works – The Dialogues – give us a mine of thought which are singular in their depth of insight and beauty. Plato not only made contribution to knowledge through his writings, but opened vistas for the advancement of learning and the dissemination of knowledge. The Academy, which he founded can be compared to a university pursuing teaching and research in both exact and humane sciences. He encouraged the teaching of mathematics, astronomy, the physical sciences, music and the humanities. He had even developed a theory of the sciences in the dialogues like the Republic (book vii), theaed, and Timaeus. He had also made lasting contribution to the theory of knowledge in the Theaetetus. The details of his educational and academic plan are laid down in the Republic.

Born in the year 427 B.C., Plato’s life was spectacular and eventful. He was full of Utopian ideas
and ideals. He even launched a project for the education of philosopher king, although it was a miserable failure. He died at the age of 81 years in about 347 B.C. He was noble, aristocratic and idealistic.

Plato was a prolific writer, having written about thirty-six works in the form of Dialogues and letters. Scholars have prepared chronology of his writings in ancient times, historical accounts, style, context, theme, etc. These dialogues have been divided into periods.

The main aim of the thesis is to study Plato's theory of reality. In the course of the study the major philosophical works of Plato have been discussed. Exposition of Plato's main viewpoints with necessary interpretation wherever required have been made.

II

Plato was influenced by the thought and ideas of his predecessors and contemporaries. Among the great thinkers who influenced Plato and whose ideas Plato considered seriously, mention may be made of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Socrates, Zeno, etc.
Under the influence of Pythagoras, Plato introduced the Orphic religious element in his philosophy. Besides, he laid great emphasis on the study of mathematics and mathematical interpretation of thought and reality. The Pythagoreans supposed that the substances of all things were numbers. For them the whole universe was harmony. Taking cue from Pythagoras, Plato considered that there is harmony and order in the cosmos. Plato was also influenced by the ethical convictions of the Pythagoreans. The mystic elements in Plato can also be traced back to Pythagoras.

From Heraclitus Plato derived the thought that everything is changing in the sensible world. Heraclitus maintained that all things in the world are in constant flow and flux. In developing his philosophy of the Ideas, Plato recognised the importance of Heraclitus's primary intuition, the logos, as the rational principle governing all becoming. Later, under the influence of Socrates, Plato rejected the Heraclitean view on the logos, and also denied that the world of becoming is the real world. Parmenides deeply influenced Plato's thought that reality is eternal and permanent and that all changes are illusory. Parmenides developed
the conception of "beauty" in opposition to the Heraclitean conception of "becoming". Following Parmenides, Plato described each idea as "true being", one indivisible, simple and immutable. For both Parmenides and Plato, being is knowable. It alone is the truly real and fixed object of true knowledge. Plato's natural philosophy also was to some extent related to Parmenides's cosmology. Since both of them place the sensible world between the two poles of being and not-being. The greatest influence in developing Plato's philosophy was the thought of his teacher Socrates. In respect of the method of inquiry, the development of the theory of knowledge, reality and morality, Plato was influenced by Socrates.

Plato adopted the Socratic method of evolving truth in the form of dialogues. Socrates starts from common opinion which he reject through systematic cross-examination, and then tries to arrive at the truth. He also aimed at evolving the definition of concepts by a process of induction i.e. with the help of concrete example. His aim was to discover the essential characteristics of the subject to be defined so as to reach clear and distinct concepts. At times he adopted Zeno's method of *Reductio ad absurdum*, to
reject false hypothesis by pointing at the possibility of counter examples. Plato followed all these Socratic methods of inquiry. Plato adopted the Socratic method of seeking enlightenment by advancing from particulars to universal concepts and definitions.

The moral and political doctrines of Plato, mainly in the earlier Dialogues, have been founded on the Socratic principles and ideals. Like Socrates, he believed that "all virtue is knowledge". The moral principles evinced in the Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus, Gorgias, Crito, and Theaetetus have their origin in the thought of Socrates. Plato followed the Socratic dictum that all knowledge is knowledge through concepts, thereby paving the way for the development of rationalism in epistemology. Likewise, Socrates influenced Plato in his theory of Ideas because the theory of Ideas is the theory of the objectivity of concepts. The Socratic doctrine of virtue and morality also left deep impression on Plato. In fact, Plato was impressed by Socrates's own eventful life which had been sacrificed at the altar of truth and morality. The Trilogy - Apology, Crito and Phaedo has been devoted on the life of Socrates and the Socratic ideals. Socrates was, for Plato, the model and example of the true philosopher.
III

Plato’s theory of reality is based upon a theory of knowledge which was developed mainly in the *Theaetetus* and the *Republic*. The epistemological theory has two aspects – one positive and the other negative. The former is present in the *Republic* and the latter in the *Theaetetus*. Starting with the negative aspect first, in the *Theaetetus* Plato refuted false theories of knowledge. One such theory is the Protagorean view that knowledge is sense perception. According to Plato, true knowledge must be infallible and permanent. But sense perception cannot be knowledge since it is neither infallible nor about what truly is. Moreover, the information supplied by senses are fluctuating; they go on changing. Plato had advanced arguments to prove that perception is not the whole of knowledge, and that even within its own sphere perception is not knowledge. The belief that perception is knowledge is nothing but false opinion. Plato made a distinction between knowledge and belief also. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato hinted that true knowledge must be knowledge of the universal and what remains abiding in the midst of the changes.

In the *Theaetetus*, after finding that knowing cannot be equated with seeing, the *Theaetetus* suggested
depicts four grades of knowledge through which the mind can ascend to the ideas. This allegory can be compared with the simile of divided line in respect of the division of the grades of knowledge and their corresponding objects. Plato was convinced that man is under illusion because of the lower levels of awareness that arise out of perception experience. He thought that man should rise above this situation and seek what is really real. This can be done only through a proper programme of education. Education alone can lift man above the lower grades of knowledge. He also thought that knowledge and moral excellence go hand in hand. So, for the purpose of moral edification, true knowledge of the ideas, which alone are real, is a must. Plato was deeply concerned with the conduct of life, with tending the soul and with the good of the state and the welfare of the citizens. In the *Nepos*, Plato developed another theory of knowledge. This is the theory of knowledge as recollection. Plato argued, for instance, that mathematical knowledge must be already present in the mind at birth and as such, this knowledge must be innate. To prove this point, a slave boy has been made to prove Pythagorean theorem in geometry through a series of related questions and answer.
that knowing should be equated with thinking. But since thinking can be mistaken, knowing should be equated with correct thinking. A person who knows that something is the case is not mistaken. If he is mistaken, he cannot be said to know. However, Plato did not give a substantive viewpoint on what true knowledge consists in except hinting that the object of knowledge should be something abiding. Plato's positive view on knowledge was presented in the Republic. Plato distinguished the degrees or levels of knowledge on the basis of the nature of the objects. To drive home his point Plato took the help of similes, metaphors and allegories. By means of these, Plato also explained his theory of Ideas which formed the basis of his philosophy.

In the simile of the Divided line, Plato distinguished four segments or levels of knowledge namely, conjecture (whose objects are images), belief (whose objects are sensible objects), understanding (whose objects are the Ideas). Plato maintained that dialectical knowledge is the highest because it is based on reason, and its objects are the immutable Ideas.

The allegory of the cave gives us the key to Plato's theory of man's knowledge of the Ideas. It
Plato's thesis, that learning is recollection, has led to a problem in the philosophy of education - a problem which is sometimes known as "the paradox of learning".

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato argued elaborately that knowledge would not be true opinion even if that opinion could give an account of itself. In the *Republic*, he was more definite in declaring that knowledge could not be the same as opinion, as opinion is fallible whereas true knowledge is infallible. In the *Republic*, Plato spoke about the importance of the hypothetical method, but he discounted such a method as the best. In the end, Plato was convinced that true knowledge can be realized through some sort of direct vision or intuition. Philosophy, for Plato, is vision. Plato maintained that the philosopher is "the spectator of all time and existence".

IV

Plato's theory of Ideas forms the basis of his metaphysics. We find discussion on this central issue in the dialogues of the middle period, especially in the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic*. The philosophical themes covered in these works are immortality of the soul, love, justice, ideal society, the good, etc.
Plato's theory of Ideas is the metaphysical answer to the question: what, in the midst of the changes and appearances in the world, is that ultimate reality from which everything else is to be explained? Plato maintains that Ideas or Forms alone are real in the midst of the changing things.

In support of his theory of Ideas Plato had given several arguments. According to Plato, Ideas or Forms act as patterns or standard specimens. He said that the Ideas are inaccessible to the senses, he maintained that they can be seen with the help of "the eye of the soul" and that they are to be contemplated upon.

Plato maintained that there must be an idea wherever a concept can be formed and wherever there is a class of many things called by one name. A clear exposition of the doctrine of Ideas is given in the last two books of the Republic.

The main features of the Ideas are as follows:

(i) Ideas are real entities defined as the objects corresponding to abstract concepts.

(ii) There is a great variety of Ideas, including the
Ideas of classes of concrete things of qualities, of relations, of value, etc.

(iii) The ideas belong to a realm "a heaven of ideas" which is separable from concrete particulars in space and time.

(iv) The ideas are superior to particulars in the scale of reality and value. The ideas are the realities of which the particulars are mere appearances.

(v) The ideas are neither strictly mental nor physical. They subsist independently of any knowing mind.

(vi) The ideas do not exist in space and time. They subsist in "the region above the heaven." This suggests that they are not in space.

(vii) The ideas are eternal. The eternity of ideas has been elaborately explained in the Timaeus.

(viii) The ideas are not compounded out of parts. They are simple.

(ix) Particular objects "participate in" the ideas.

(x) Ideas may be classified into: ethical and
esthetic ideas, ideas corresponding to general notions such as sameness and difference, mathematical ideas, ideas for natural kinds, and ideas for the kinds of artifacts. Plato has attached the greatest importance to the values. Thus, the highest idea is the idea of the good. For Plato, knowledge, reality and value form organic unity.

V

Plato was a builder of system of thought. We find a cosmological system in the Timaeus, which is one of the later dialogues. In this dialogue, Plato developed his cosmology, physics, biology and psychology. The Timaeus has three parts: (a) Introductory recapitulation by Socrates of the contents of the Republic; (b) the narration by Critias of the heroic exploit of Athens in resisting and defeating the kings of Atlantis; (c) the cosmological discourse of Timaeus.

The Timaeus maintains that the sensible world is a world of happening and that whatever happens has a cause. This means that that which comes into being is the product of an agent. The whole world has been
created by a maker. It is argued that since a craftsman has a model or archetype before him, the best craftsman must have an eternal model. Moreover, since the Maker is the best of all causes and the things he makes the best of all effects, clearly the model of which the sensible world is "a copy" is eternal.

Plato argued that since the maker is perfectly good, he did not want to keep his goodness to himself. So he took over the whole of the "visible", which was in a condition of chaotic disorder and made it into an ordered system, since order is better than chaos, the maker put mind (Nous) into it, and as mind can only exist in a soul, he gave it a soul. Thus, the sensible world became a being with soul and mind. The model in the likeness of which the maker made the world was an intelligible living something. The world, then, is the sensible embodiment of a living organism of which all other living creatures are parts. Thus, the Timaeus had been constructed upon a comparison between man and the visible universe, just as the Republic compares man and the state. The cosmos is a living being with body and rational soul formed by the maker, the Demiurge on the model of the ideal living being.
In the creation myth of the Timaeus, Plato described the formation of the cosmic body as a living organism compounded of opposing elements mixed in proportion. His view in this respect is close to that of Empedocles. Plato's cosmic body is made up of the four elements of Empedocles, namely, fire, water, air, and earth. Plato introduced not only the notion of "proportion" but also the doctrine of the "mean" in the creation of the world. Thus Plato conceived of the cosmic body as a compound of opposing elements in proper proportion, which he analysed in mathematical terms. He maintained that if there is no balance and proportion among the elements in the cosmos, it will return to its original state of chaos when in the various powers, hot, cold, dry, moist, the exist in complete disorder. Such a condition has been compared by Plato to the state in which human body is attacked by diseases. Plato's description of the demiurge as a divine draftsman outside the world and distinct from the forms is a historic way of describing the source of the cosmos. For Plato equality, balance and uniformity produce peace and stability among opposing elements. He also maintained that the cosmic soul is the model of the rational soul of man. Plato inferred from the regular character of the great cosmic motions
and their systematics unity that the souls which originate then form a hierarchy with the best soul, God, at their head. Thus, for Plato god is a soul among souls, of course, the best among them. He maintains that god moulds the sensible upon the pattern of god, who is a soul and not a Form, and the good, which is the supreme Form, was not clearly defined by Plato. This became an important issue in the thought of Plotinus and the neo-platonists.

Plato’s view of the world is teleological. He believed that reality is at bottom teleological. He also held that the world is an intelligence, guided by reason and directed towards an ethical goal. The real causes of the world is teleological or final cause. The physical causes are merely subsidiary. Whatever is good, rational and purposeful in the universe is due to reason. It is through reason that balance and equilibrium has been maintained in the cosmos.

VI

In connection with the nature and destiny of man, Plato maintains that man is a composite of a phenomenal body and a soul. The soul, however, has
prominence over the physical frame. Plato holds that man is the highest among the living beings because there are divine elements in man.

Man was brought into existence by different powers. The lower gods formed portions of the four elements in the human body, and the demiurge bestowed on man the higher soul, which is the seat of reason, immortality and divinity. The soul existed before its union with the body, because of its union with the physical body, it forgot what it formerly knew. But what has been forgotten persists as slumbering knowledge in the soul and is able to be awakened. Upon repeated perception of the sensible images of beauty, truth, and goodness, the soul remembers the ideas of beauty, truth and goodness. Plato maintains that knowledge is recollection and that it can be aroused through education. Thus, Plato believed in the pre-existence of the soul.

An important feature of Plato's philosophy of man is the doctrine of the tripartite soul as found in the Republic and the Phaedrus. According to this doctrine, the soul consists of three parts: the rational part, the courageous or spirited part and the
sensible or the appetitive part. These parts are the functions or principles of action. They are not parts in the physical sense.

The rational part is primarily intellectual and is characteristic of philosophical thinking. The spirited part is an executive faculty which works with the will. Plato incorporates within the spirited part certain emotions and sentiments associated with the courageous acts. The appetitive part is associated with the desire for pleasure and bodily satisfaction. Plato advocated (like Aristotle) the adoption of the middle path or the doctrine of the mean in the pursuit of pleasure. Plato maintained that the soul functions through parts which are distinct and separate. There are conflicts among them, but there may be interplay and cooperation among them, because the soul, in the midst of the plurality of the functions of its parts, possesses unity and indivisibility. Plato locates the rational part of the soul in the head, the spirited part in the breast, and the appetitive part below the waist.

Plato attached greatest importance to the rational faculty of the soul. He held that God within man's
soul is reason. Reason distinguishes man from the other animals. Reason is called divine because of its affinity to the intelligible ideas it contemplates. The rational soul in man is like the soul of the cosmos. Plato also said that there is close working together of mind and body.

An important feature of Plato's theory of the soul is its immortality. In the Phaedo, he argued in favour of the immortality of the soul. The arguments are derived from Plato's doctrine of the Idea as well as from the concept of the soul as a simple entity which is the embodiment of life and consciousness in man. Plato's faith in immortality of the soul has great bearing and significance on the moral life and ultimate destiny of man. In the Gorgias and Republic, Plato has used the hope of the immortality of the soul for a moral purpose. "The value of faith in it is that it drives home the question what manner of man we ought to be, if there is an endless feature before us and thus invests the choice for moral good and evil with an awful importance it would otherwise not have" (A.F. Taylor).

In the moral philosophy of Plato, like that of Kant, faith in the immortality of the soul is a pre-
condition (apostulate) for the possibility of practical moral life and the evaluation of human moral conducts. Immortality of the soul, thus, has great relevance to the philosophy of Plato, which by and large lays great stress on the excellence of moral value in the individual and corporate life of mankind.

VII

In the light of our discussion of Plato's philosophical thought in general and the theory of reality in particular, it may be maintained that Plato is the greatest Western philosopher. The dimension and profundity of the philosophy is unique and unparalleled. He has dwelt upon almost every aspect of life and existence. He has raised perennial issues in various fields of philosophy, theoretical and practical. His viewpoints on the cognitive, moral, aesthetic, religious and political matters are still relevant to the philosophical debates in our own time. Considered from the standpoint of the philosophical issues which he tackled, Plato may be regarded as our own contemporary. It is not strange that there has been a revival of interest in the philosophy of Plato even in the present century. The ideals that Plato has set in his writings
are, indeed, milestones for those who aspire after excellence in intellectual attainment. They also give beacon light to those who want to lead a good life.